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SUBJECT: MILITANTS KILL ANTI-TALIBAN LEADER IN SWAT

REF: A. PESHAWAR 0536

Classified By: Ambassador Anne W. Patterson, Reasons 1.4
(A), (B), and (D).

11. (C) Summary. Militants in Pakistan's Swat Valley killed Pir Samiullah, a popular local religious leader on December 14, executed dozens of his followers, and kidnapped others. Samiullah was an independent figure who generally eschewed politics and drew hundreds of followers. Pir Samiullah's murder seemed to signify that militants in Swat will not tolerate any competition - ideological or otherwise. It also supported statements made earlier by Awami National Party (ANP) Senior Vice President Haji Adeel December 6 that the NWFP government had "lost control" of Swat. End summary.

Who Was Pir Samiullah?

12. (C) Pir Samiullah was a popular local religious leader living in Mandal Dag village in Matta district, Swat. Pir is a title for a Sufi master, which is sometimes translated into English as "saint." In Sufism, a Pir's role is to guide and instruct his disciples to turn their hearts toward God by reading the Koran and meditating on God's will. Some Embassy and consulate contacts said Samiullah was not interested in politics and had attracted followers because of his religious authority. Others maintained that he was known to be anti-taliban, and had tried in the past to form lashkars (tribal militias) to oppose the militants. Samiullah's followers have been described as a diverse group, including villagers, bureaucrats and even criminals. Many of Samiullah's followers were said to be victims of taliban threats or violence. Pir Samiullah had reportedly told the taliban several times earlier this year that he did not have a political agenda and was not seeking to lead a rival group against them.

Taliban Attempted to Kidnap Pir Samiullah in October

13. (C) In October, the Swat taliban under Maulana Fazlullah reportedly demanded that Pir Samiullah leave the area. Later that month, after Samiullah had refused, militants tried to kidnap him, accusing Samiullah of having raised an armed lashkar against them.

Samiullah's followers reportedly engaged in a five-hour battle with the militants. Ten militants were reportedly killed, along with five of Samiullah's followers.

Pir Samiullah's "Lashkar"

14. (C) Reports from Swat differ on whether Pir Samiullah formed a lashkar, or intended to. Some of Samiullah's followers may have engaged in fighting with militants without his direction. Although some media reports described Pir Samiullah's followers as forming a "lashkar," his group differed from lashkars in other areas of NWFP and FATA because his followers' mission may have been to simply protect him, not to actively resist the taliban. In other areas such as Bajaur, lashkars have demanded that militants leave their areas, actively sought out fighting engagements with them, and arrested and burned houses of militant supporters. Samiullah's followers, until recently, did not engage in similar activities.

15. (U) Some groups similar to lashkars have been formed in Swat, such as the Qaumi Aman Jirga, which recently demanded that militants leave their area, and the Kanju Peace Committee, which assisted security forces in Kabal tehsil. But it remains unclear how significant or effective these local forces will be.

Taliban Kill Pir Samiullah

16. (U) Taliban killed Pir Samiullah on December 14 after a gun battle with about 200 of his followers. The taliban accused Samiullah's men

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of a hand-grenade attack on the house of a local taliban commander two days prior. In response to the hand-grenade attack the taliban killed dozens of Samiullah's followers and burned his residence. When many of Samiullah's followers claimed that the religious figure had not died, the taliban exhumed his body and hung it in a public area.

Comment

17. (C) Pir Samiullah's group of followers was relatively small; no reports suggested his followers exceeded 500. It is unclear whether his followers sought refuge from Mullah Fazlullah's taliban or were drawn to him for purely religious reasons. But Pir Samiullah may have been Mullah Fazlullah's only rival in Swat. Samiullah's murder seemed to signify that the Swat taliban will not tolerate any competition - ideological or otherwise.